

# VIEW FROM THE CHEAP SEATS

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## **Why Few People Respect Advertising in the Morning**

*(Or any other time of day)*

As an industry that assaults the public with unwelcome messages, advertising has a responsibility to do more than just make, or take, money. So, when I see a high-profile campaign that sucks, it really pisses me off because everyone sees the greed and shallowness of the ad industry.

The consequences are harmful when a high profile campaign misses the mark so widely. I'll pick one example.

You've all seen the latest anti-drug ads or at least you've heard about them. Teenagers saying overly dramatic soundbites like, "I helped kidnap a Columbian judge" or "I helped slaughter a Venezuelan family."

You're supposed to believe these teens are somewhat responsible for the treacherous state of today's world just because they smoked pot or popped Ecstasy.

Give me a fuckin' break.

I'm not going to spew a long-winded political diatribe on the subject. This column isn't "Hardball." No matter what I think about the war on drugs or the war on terrorism, the fact remains this ad campaign is an untruthful, irrelevant, giant steaming pile of crap.

However, I'm willing to be a good, compliant American. If the Government's new ad strategy involves using the threat of terrorism to fix our nation's ills, I'm on board.

In fact, I've even conceptualized the second round of the campaign. Here's my thinking and the execution:

-What has funded our recent terrorism more than drug money? America's dependence on oil.

-Who in America uses the most oil? Folks who drive SUV's and minivans.

-Who drives SUV's and minivans? Soccer moms.

So I say the next batch of ads feature soccer moms behind the wheel of their Expeditions and Land Rovers, saying their gas-guzzling vehicles encourage terrorism and worldwide carnage.

Now, why won't you see those ads? Simple. Soccer moms vote. Teenagers don't.

The current ads point fingers at teenagers, a group of people who don't have a registered voice to talk back, and it's a cop-out to lay the terrorist problem at their feet. Yes, the anti-drug campaign is controversial. It's being talked about. Fine.

Stopping terrorism and drug use by linking the two won't put a dent in either. Good advertising has at least a nugget of truth, believability, or entertainment. The anti-drug spots fail on all three accounts.

I picked this campaign because it isn't a Macaroni & Cheese or feminine hygiene account. We expect those categories to be filled with bad work. I don't intend to piss on this one campaign and the campaign's creators.

Simply put, I want to illustrate that bad thinking on a high-profile account in a public service-type category like this is truly harmful to the advertising industry.

Admittedly, I feel slightly sorry for the ad folks who worked on the campaign. I know it sucks to work from a ridiculous creative brief, having done it many times myself. Plus, the client is the Government. Uncle Sam is well-stocked with guns and search warrants.

What are you gonna do, look your powerful client in the eye and tell them they're wrong? Would your agency (or any agency, for that matter) turn down lucrative government cash on principle alone?

I will venture a guess that most ad professionals see right through public service campaigns that do nothing to truly serve the public. Ad people have a knack for detecting bullshit even while we are slinging it. If we as ad professionals don't believe it, why do we think millions of people will believe it?

Recently, the outgoing Chairman of the Board of Directors of the 4A's said that the general public doesn't respect the ad industry "as much as they should." Well, duh. I think the anti-drug campaign is a high-profile example of why.

Advertising can be a powerful tool to advance businesses, organizations and certainly causes. Advancing those entities successfully means strategic thinking and execution that comes from an honest place.

It's not too late to maintain some credibility of the craft of advertising. First, however, we need to stop whoring ourselves to anyone who waves a buck in our face, and then ask to be respected.